



Queen's Birthday begins with an official ceremony at Wilhelmina Park

This past Monday Aruba was busy celebrating the birthday of Aruba's sovereign monarch, beloved Queen Beatrix. Various activities were conducted throughout the day, beginning with the official protocol ceremony at the Wilhelmina Park in the morning. Though the birthday of Queen Beatrix is not actually April 30, this day has been designated as the official national holiday.

During the reigns of Queen Wilhelmina and then her daughter, Queen Juliana, it was the custom to celebrate Koninginnedag on the Queen's birthday – August 31 and then April 30, when Queen Juliana ascended the throne. On the day of her investiture, 30 April 1980, Queen Beatrix stated that she wished to continue celebrating it on 30 April, as a mark of respect for her mother.

The holiday finds its origins during the years that Queen Emma, Queen Wilhelmina's mother, spent the summers at Soestdijk Palace, where the local population would present her with a floral tribute on her birthday August 2. When Princess Juliana took up residence in her grandmother's country home following her marriage in 1937, the tradition was continued on her birthday, April 30. After her accession to the throne in 1948, this became the date designated as Koninginnedag when the ritual was performed and the modest parade grew into a national event, which was shown on television from the 1950s onwards. During Queen Juliana's reign, it gradually became the custom for everyone to have a day off, which ultimately became an official public holiday.

This year's celebration, as every year, was attended by every Aruban chapter of the International Scouts, which paraded down the boulevard to gather in the park for the raising, side by side, of the Dutch and Aruban Flag, accompanied by the national anthem of both countries. Attending the ceremony on behalf of the Queen was her appointed representative in Aruba, His Excellency Governor Fredis Refunjol, accompanied by his wife. Attending on behalf of the Aruban Government was President of Parliament, Mervyn Wyatt-Ras. Additional dignitaries included ministers and members of Parliament, Chief Commissioner of Police Peter de Witte and Lieutenant-Colonel J.R. Mac Mootry, Commandant of the Royal Dutch Marine Camp, whose elite corps was presented to the Governor Refunjol as part of the ritual celebration.

After Governor Refunjol inspected the contingent of the Royal Dutch Marines, Senora Wyatt-Ras, on behalf of the Aruban people addressed the gathering and expressed the regard of the people for their monarch, declaring "Long Live the Queen!," which was also expressed by Governor Refunjol in his address to the gathering.

The official morning ended with Governor Refunjol awarding the annual "Youth Cup" in the memory of Aruba's first governor, Felipe B. Tromp. A tradition that began in 1992, the trophy is presented to a young person that has made an outstanding contribution to Aruba, be it in the field of culture, art, sports, or community service. This year the cup went to the members of the traditional dance troupe Sunrise Dancers under the direction of Ferdinand Franca. Additionally receiving plaques of recognition were the "Youth Sonrisa," a group of teenagers that donate their time to working with the mentally challenged, and Bryan Lendering, who is considering an exemplarily role model for Aruba's youth; not only very active in scouting and sports, but also achieving scholastic excellence. The Land and Sea division of Aruba Scouting, known as "Seals" was also presented with a plaque.

A final inspection of the Royal Guard by the governor and a wish for happy holiday ended the official portion of this day of celebration and fun activities as Arubans, who consider themselves loyal subjects and love their queen, honored this tradition.